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Vladimir Putin's 'War on Fascism' and the Russian Links to Far-Right and Antisemitic Parties in Europe

Introduction

It might almost sound like paradise on earth – Jews being invited to come to Russia by President Vladimir Putin,[1] who, at one of the meetings of the European Jewish Congress in the Kremlin, organized by the Russian oligarch Moshe Vyacheslav Kantor, depicted his country as a safe haven when contrasted with the declining West.[2] This was endorsed by the local leader of the *Chabad* movement, Berel Lazar, who agreed and said that "Putin is rebuilding the Soviet empire, this time without antisemitism [...] For the Jews, it is a miracle".[3]

However, this ostensibly anti-Fascist and anti-antisemitic Russian ethos is somewhat tainted by the fact that the Putin's regime has the tendency to view the world through conspiracist lens that leaves the door open for antisemitism. Moreover, the regime receives a strong vocal support from far-right fascist and antisemitic parties, to which, arguably, it provides certain financial, organizational and to some extent even ideological support. The following chapter attempts to tackle some of these paradoxes within the narrow limits of an academic paper by providing an overview of recent personal and financial contacts as well as ideological and geopolitical affinity between the Russian authorities and European far-right parties. A brief overview of the levels of antisemitism in Russia and Ukraine is included in order to provide context.

Russia and Ukraine – Antisemitism as a Weapon

The general level of antisemitism in Russia is reported to be lower than the Eastern European average, The *Anti-Defamation League* (ADL), for instance, reports

1 Pfeffer, Anshel: How Putin's man made his way to the top of European Jewry. *Ha-Aretz*, 2 February 2016.

2 Putin offers Russian refuge to European Jews facing anti-Semitism. Russia Today, 20 January 2016.

3 Back in the USSR? *Times of Israel*, 30 April 2014.

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that about 23 percent of Russians may harbor antisemitic stereotypes, which is a significant drop from the 30 percent recorded in 2014 and far below the Eastern European average.[4] The Secretary-General of the pro-Kremlin *Euroasian Jewish Congress* (EJC) in Moscow, Mikhail Chlenov, has two explanations for the decline: "First, the president in Russia is not an anti-Semite [...] Second, xenophobes have switched their attention from Jews to other ethnic groups".[5]

There appear to have only been a few dozen officially reported antisemitic incidents in Russia in recent years, most of which were verbal assaults or vandalism, although isolated cases of violence did occur. In 2014, the *Russian Jewish Congress* (RJC) pointed out several cases of explicit antisemitic manifestations at the level of regional politics and the national media. However, while the report insisted that current levels of antisemitism in the country still remain fairly low, it also noted a significant increase in antisemitism in Russia during the first months of 2014 and warned against the "return of antisemitism to the mainstream".[6]

In its detailed sociological survey of 2016, the *Russian Jewish Congress*, in cooperation with the *Levada Center*, confirmed the ADL and EJC findings regarding the dramatic improvement in attitudes towards Jews, as well as the generally low rates of antisemitic convictions within society. Antisemitism is seen as latent or passive. It is no longer seen as a grass-roots phenomenon in Russia. However, the survey also issued a warning that antisemitism is "nurtured by the increasingly intense nationalistic propaganda in the state-owned media and by the official traditionalist rhetoric".[7] In the survey's conclusions, the RJC regarded this media focused antisemitism as a side-effect of what it called a "post-imperial syndrome", in which the frustration of losing superpower status mixes with attempts to refocus the "growing dissatisfaction of society towards inner and outer enemies".[8] As if to support these conclusions, the prestigious Levada Center, which prepared this report, was blacklisted by the Russian authorities as being a "Foreign Agent".[9]

Antisemitic conspiracy theories are publicly presented in the Russian mainstream media, including television, which is the most influential media outlet in

4 The ADL Global 100: An Index of Antisemitism 2014. http://global100.adl.org/.

5 Chulkovskaya, Yekaterina: Experts say anti-Semitism is in decline in Russia, but are they right? *Russia Beyond the Headlines,* 11 November 2016.

6 Proyavlenyi antisemitizma v Rossyi z Yanvara po Aprel 2014 goda, *Russian Jewish Congress*.

7 Study report 'Anti-Semitism in today's Russia'. *Russian Jewish Congress*.

8 Study report 'Anti-Semitism in today's Russia'. *Russian Jewish Congress*.

9 Leading Independent Pollster Blacklisted as 'Foreign Agent', *The Moscow Times*, 5 August 2016.

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the country. Recent example from private channels would include the REN-TV documentary, which blamed the Jews for the sinking of the Titanic, Chernobyl disaster and 9/11 attacks.[10] Antisemitism does appear on the state-run channels as well – the most notorious example would be *Rossyia 24*, where antisemites, such as the ultranationalist Alexander Prokhanov, are invited for interviews.[11] And while there is occasional *ex post* criticism of these expressions, this criticism seems less convincing in a society, where all media are under increased government control. The more censorship and limits on free speech the state applies, the more responsibility it also has to take for such extremist and antisemitic manifestations in the media it controls. That is the paradox of censorship. If antisemitic expressions continue to appear, while journalists get killed and TV stations closed down over anti-regime criticism, then it casts serious doubt over sincerity of Vladimir Putin's 'anti-Fascist' proclamations.[12] Especially, as Putin occasionally uses the conspiracist patterns of speech himself, like when he accused the German *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of performing agenda of the American investment bank Goldman Sachs. He made this remark in response to the 2016 Panama papers case, using an allusion to an alleged conspiracy of 'American financial oligarchy'. Putin later apologized for these remarks.[13]

The conspiracist mindset was particularly apparent in the propaganda warfare that surrounded the war in Eastern Ukraine. Both sides in the conflict have occasionally resorted to anti-Jewish violence, be it to attack Jews directly, or to use a false-flag antisemitic incident in order to blame the other party. Alleged antisemitic incidents were used by the Russian Federation as one of the pretexts for the takeover of the Crimea.[14] The same pattern of false-flag antisemitic incidents continued during the incursion into Eastern Ukraine. Some of these incidents involved fake news items, such as *Russia Today's* piece on Jews who were allegedly preparing for evacuation from Odessa.[15] Other incidents really did take place; however, the perpetrators' motives and allegiances are unknown.[16] It is

10 Russian TV blames Jews for sinking of Titanic, Chernobyl and 9/11, *The Coordination Forum for Countering Antisemitism*,12 August 2016.

11 See for example: Russian TV Anchor Implies Jews Brought Holocaust On Themselves, *RadioFreeEurope*, 24 March 2014.

12 For the takeover of Russian TV market by the state, see: Supjeva, Laura: Russian Television under Putin. *Global Politics – Časopis pro politiku a mezinárodní vztahy.*

13 Kremlin says sorry to Goldman Sachs, German paper over Panama Papers slip-up. *Reuters,* 15 April 2016.

14 Kondrachuk, Masha and Stephen Ennis: Jews reject Russia claims of Ukraine anti-Semitism. *BBC*, 12 November 2014.

15 Buses and armed guards. Odessa Jews ready for mass evacuation, *Russia Today,* 5 May 2014.

16 Ukrainian synagogue firebombed. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency,* 20 April 2014.

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not known, for example, who was actually responsible for the provocative leaflets calling on the Donetsk Jews to register and pay a "Jewish tax".[17] Unfortunately, as Abraham Foxman, the chief of the *Anti-Defamation League* commented in his piece: "Even fake hate can fuel instability".[18]

The use of antisemitism in propaganda warfare has placed the *Anti-Defamation League* in a new, previously unknown position, in which it is forced to deny allegations of antisemitism. In response to the repeated allegations about the Ukrainian government being a "fascist and antisemitic junta", Foxman wrote: "[I]t is pure demagoguery and an effort to rationalize criminal behavior on the part of Russia to invoke the anti-Semitism ogre into the struggle in Ukraine. In fact, it is fair to say that there was more anti-Semitism manifest in the worldwide Occupy Wall Street movement than we have seen so far in the revolution taking place in Ukraine."[19]

In its 2015 report the ADL indicated that 32 percent of the Ukrainian population might be harboring antisemitic stereotyped views, a drop from 38 percent in the previous year.[20] The local Jewish communities stated that although they did experience everyday expressions of antisemitism, this was not at the state level – definitely not enough to justify the unilateral armed actions of a foreign power. As the historian Timothy Snyder pointed out, the most dangerous time for Ukrainian Jews is when there is a collapse of the state and foreign incursion: "[T]he Jews in Ukraine [today] have no reason for anyone to invade the country, regardless of who that might be, because it's a breakdown in the state which is the most dangerous thing for them,".[21]

The Russian-Ukrainian war is already taking its Jewish toll. According to the Jewish Agency, more than 5,500 Ukrainian Jews made *aliyah* to Israel in 2014.[22] In 2015, an additional 7,000 Jews, "a staggering 11 percent of the Ukrainian Jewish population",[23] migrated to the Jewish state.[24] This made Ukraine the second

17 Sokol, Sam: Jews Cast Doubt on Origin of Anti-Semitic Flyers in Donetsk. *Jerusalem post*, 18 April 2014.

18 Foxman, Abraham B.: Anti-Semitism card overplayed in Ukraine. *USA Today*, 17 April 2014.

19 Foxman, Abraham B.: Russia plays the antisemitism card. Anti-Defamation League, 14 March 2014.

20 Press Release – New ADL Poll Finds Dramatic Decline in Anti-Semitic Attitudes in France; Significant Drops in Germany and Belgium. Anti-Defamation *League*, 30 June 2015.

21 Snyder, Timothy: Putin's Anti-Semitic Claims 'Ridiculous'. Ukraine Jewish Leader. *NBC News*, 15 March 2014.

22 Aliyah Hits Ten-Year High. Approximately 26,500 New Immigrants Arrived in Israel in 2014. *Jewish Agency*, 2 January 2015.

23 Aslan-Levy, Eylon: Aliyah Numbers Rise, but the Majority Coming From Just Three Countries. *Tabletmag*, 22 April 2016.

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largest source of Jewish *aliyah*, closely following the widely discussed issue of France. The third largest source, however, has been Russia, from which about 12,000 people migrated to Israel in 2014 and 2015. "The depreciation of the Russian ruble and the erosion of civil liberties under the government of Vladimir Putin" are quoted as being the main reasons for this new wave of Russian Jewish migration to Israel according to Nathan Sharansky.[25] And while the immigration levels from Ukraine and France plummeted in 2016, the wave of Russian *aliyah* continued unabated and reached a 10-year high, surpassing France as the main source of Jewish *aliyah* to Israel in 2016. As the *Jewish Agency* has observed, the typical *olim* from this new wave of Russian migration to Israel are members of the liberal intelligentsia from Moscow and St. Petersburg, who feel that their lifestyle may be in danger under Putin.[26]

Ideological Links

The first contacts between the Russian and the European-far-right can be traced back to the days of the Soviet Union in the 1980s and 1990s. Interested in the works of neo-Fascist and New Right thinkers in Europe, the later ideologue of Eurasianism, Alexander Dugin, made contact with New Right parties in Italy, France, Spain and in other countries in order to study the thought of Julius Evola and Alan de Benoist.[27] After his return to Russia, Dugin first experimented with so-called National Bolshevism – a third way ideology that sought to unite elements of Bolshevism and Fascism. After his break with National Bolshevism, he re-discovered the idea of Euroasianism.

Eurasianism is often referred to as the 'fourth political theory' after communism, fascism and liberalism. It is a complex conglomerate of ideas drawn from communism, fascism, radical environmentalism and religious traditionalism. The basic idea is that Russia belongs neither to Europe (i.e.: the West), neither to Asia (i.e.: the Orient) and that it is a distinct entity, a continent of its own, whose inhabitants are chosen to preserve the traditional values against conspiracies of demonic alien powers – the wicked Atlantics. In his most influential pam-

24 30,000 Immigrants Arrived in Israel in 2015. *Jewish Agency.*

25 France is Israel's largest source of aliyah for the 2nd straight year. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency,* 22 December 2015.

26 Aliyah from Russia hits ten-year high but has 13 per cent drop overall. *European Jewish Congress*, 2 January 2017.

27 Laruelle, Marlene: *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Europe–Russia Relationship.* Lexington Books 2015.

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phlet *The Great War of Continents*,[28] Dugin plays out the vision of an alleged Atlantian conspiracy – an esoteric meta-conspiracy theory further linked to anti-American and judeo-masonic conspiracy theories – that can be stopped only by means of counter-conspiracy of the consolidated Eurasia. Conspiracy of the alien Atlantics justifies any means on the side of the Eurasians, who are required to expand and secure their living space in order to survive the imminent planetary-wide conflict, allegedly prepared by the Atlantics. In practice, this theory calls for 'unification' of Russia with its surrounding European territories by whatever means necessary. Explicit references to the German concepts of *Lebensraum* and *Blut und Boden* are made in this context with calls to Eurasians to stick to Eurasian soil and not to repeat the mistake of the Nazis, who allegedly put "blood over soil".[29]

The roots of the Eurasian ideology can be traced back to the Russian expat communities of the 1920s. Possibly the most important of these early Euroasianists was Nikolaevitsch Savitskii, a Russian expat and member of the famous Prague Linguistic Circle during the 1920s and 1930s.[30] However, Dugin managed to combine the already existing idea with new inspirations from the European New Right and Russian conspiracist esotericism. His radical version of Eurasianism is often referred to as neo-Eurasianism. He then set out to popularize it, ensuring that it even caught the attention of those in the higher circles of Russian politics.

At the same time, the Russian administration itself came up with its own combination of cultural conservatism, patriotism and post-Soviet nostalgia that draws certain inspiration from Euroasianism, yet it is more cautious in relation to Jewish issues. With Putin's popularity reaching record levels, the regime may be seeing the more radical far-right as a possible competitor, especially after some of the Russian far-right parties participated in the anti-Putin protests of 2011 and 2012, which led to a series of government crackdowns against the domestic far-right in Russia. And while members of Russian far-right parties participated as 'volunteers' in Eastern Ukraine, opposition commentators suggest that Putin might have actually used the Russian far-right thugs as cannon fodder in Eastern Ukraine in order to safely remove them once he had usurped their

28 Dugin, Alexander: *Velká válka kontinentů*. Adam Benjamin Bartoš: Prague 2016.

29 Dugin, *Velká válka kontinentů*, p. 11.

30 Tydlitátová, Věra: *Židé v Putinově stínu. Antisemitismus v české promoskevské propagandě*. University of West Bohemia: Pilsen 2017, p. 187. For more about the role of the Prague Circle in the Euroasian ideology, see Bassin, Mark, Sergey Glebov and Marlene Laruelle: Between Europe and Asia: *The Origins, Theories, and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism*. University of Pittsburgh Press 2015.

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ideas.[31] However, these battle-hardened far-right fanatics may well become a potential security risk for Russia itself in a fashion similar to the jihadists returning from Syria.[32]

In 2013, when tension in Ukraine was already growing, Putin's aspiration to become "the leader of global conservatism" by seeking contacts with European 'conservative' parties was already being publicly discussed by the Russian media.[33] During the previous ten years, the cultural conservatism of the Putin regime had been developing ways in which it could combine the views of both the far-right and the neo-Stalinist far-left within its approach to Soviet nostalgia. János Ladányi and Iván Szelényi have referred to the resulting ideology as "post-communist neo-conservatism"[34], a pun on American neo-Conservatism. Whatever the name of the old-new ideology, it is able to overcome the anti-Communism of the far-right without abandoning Soviet heritage. Antisemitic conspiracy theories can play a role in this process as they allow the blame for the Soviet terror to be put on the Jews as an alien, outside force. The greatness of the Soviet Union can thus be seen again as a source of Russian national pride, especially when the Jews (the 'judeobolsheviks') can be blamed for most of its crimes.

When observing Russian influence over the European far-right parties, we cannot draw a simple line between the degree of Russian influence and the degree of antisemitism. Russia seems to be in the position of tolerating or ignoring antisemitic manifestations pragmatically, while using anti-Globalist and anti-Western conspiracist thought to inject its own ideas. Some of the movements that are currently considered to be heavily under Russian influence, such as the Front National or Jobbik, have been engaged in the process of changing their formal attitudes towards the Jews, perhaps in order to achieve greater legitimacy by officially denouncing antisemitism and posing themselves as protectors of Jews against the threat of Muslim immigration. Some have even attempted to reach out to the Jews, offering their support to Israel and dealing with antisemitism in their ranks. The *Swedish Democrats* have expelled one of their members over antisemitic remarks[35] and have attempted to participate in the Jerusalem

31 Piontkovskyi, Andrei: Voennaya Doktrina "Ruskogo Mira". *Kasparov.ru*, 26 October 2014.
32 Barvoets, Jeremy: Unity Day: The Decline of Russia's Far-Right. *Leksika*, 12 November 2015.
33 Ekspert: Vladimir Putin stal liderom mirovogo konservatisma. RBK, 10 December 2013.
34 The Russian Connection – The spread of pro-Russian policies on the European far right, *Political Capital Institute*, 14 March 2014.
35 Far-right Swedish party fires MP over anti-Semitism. *The Times of Israel*.

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Leaders Summit in Israel.[36] *Jobbik*, the same far-right party that had been calling for registration of Hungarian Jews,[37] has recently made several pro-Israeli proclamations and has attempted to approach Hungarian Jewry with the offering of Chanuka blessings, drawing sharp criticism from both the Jewish community and the far-right.[38] Marine Le Pen of the Front National has expelled her own father and the party's founder, Jean Marie Le Pen, following antisemitic remarks[39] and has made some pro-Israeli statements, usually to attack Muslims.[40] Le Pen's remarks, however, leave a reason to worry as the French Jews could easily become the collateral victims of her nativist policies, even if those policies are not primarily motivated by antisemitism. Example of such a dangerous nativist policy would be the proposed ban on dual citizenship with non-EU countries – this all in a situation, when dual French-Israeli citizenship is a common 'insurance policy' among the French Jews.[41]

Other parties have simply attempted to avoid Jewish issues altogether, such as in the case of the neo-Nazi *Workers' Party* in the Czech Republic, which has significantly changed its rhetoric since the government crackdown against the party in 2009. Its leadership is extremely cautious and avoids any reference to the Jews, seeking to target Romanies and Muslims instead. However, some of the regional leaders are more outspoken. On the other hand, there are openly far right pro-Russian parties, such as the Peoples' Party of Our Slovakia (Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko), whose leader and Governor of the Bánská Bystrica Region displayed a Russian flag at the Regional Council building when welcoming the Russian, pro-Putin *Nightwolves* motorcycle club.[42] Additional examples would include the Golden Dawn in Greece, as well as the fiercely antisemitic party, National Democracy, in the Czech Republic, both of which have strong ties to Russia (see below).

36 Keinon, Herb: Israeli officials won't meet reps of far-right Swedish Party. *The Jerusalem Post*, 21 December 2016.

37 Dunai, Marton: Outrage at "Jewish list" call in Hungary parliament. *Reuters*, 27 November 2012.

38 Dunai, Marton: Hungary's Jobbik gets double rebuff for Hannukah greetings to Jews. *Reuters*, 30 December 2016.

39 French National Front expels founder Jean-Marie Le Pen *BBC News*. 20 August 2015.

40 Lipshitz, Cnaan: France's National Front gaining among Jews with tough stance on Arab anti-Semitism. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 23 September 2014.

41 Chazan, David: French Jews 'will have to give up dual Israeli citizenship' if Marine Le Pen wins presidential election. *The Telegraph*, 10 February 2017.

42 Lacková, Ľudmila: Kotleba sa zase predviedol: Na Úrad BBSK zavesil ruskú vlajku, je to ťah na voličov? *Pluska* 5, May 2016.

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It has almost become natural to expect an anti-EU and anti-Globalist movement to side with Russia. To some extent, this might be another example of the success of Russian propaganda, which has managed to present Russia as an answer in response to anti-Western and Eurosceptic sentiments. Such propaganda has managed to persuade the public that the system of geopolitical blocks that existed during the Soviet era, with its focus on 'legitimate' domains of interest, is the only way to go in today's artificially uncertain reality and that the only response to disappointment with the EU is allegiance with Russia. Yet, there are very few far-right forces that are both anti-EU or anti-Western and anti-Russian at the same time. When the Budapest-based think-tank, *Political Capital Institute*, analyzed the rhetoric of 24 European far-right parties, it discovered that 15 of them were pro-Russian, 6 appeared to be neutral or undecided and only 3 were anti-Russian. These three were in countries bordering Russia, namely Finland, Latvia and Poland.[43] There are some additional parties that escaped the Political Capital analysis. At least three new but small far-right parties have been established in the Czech Republic since 2014, all of them pro-Russian.[44] A very specific example would be, of course, the Ukrainian far-right, such as the *Svoboda* (Freedom) and *Pravy Sektor* (Right Sector). These parties, with fascist and antisemitic histories, promote the nationalist ethos and independence of Ukraine from both the West and Russia. The Ukrainian far-right, however, is losing the support, both within Ukraine and abroad. Most of the Western far-right parties even accuse it of being a part of a Zionist conspiracy, funded by "Judeo-Bandera money"[45] (sic). An example of such a conspiracy theory can be provided from the Polish far-right website *Wolna Polska*.[46]

The inner dynamics of the movement in relation to far-right attitudes to Russia has also been evident. It took some time for the Czech neo-Nazis, for instance, to reach a joint position as it required them to abandon their personal ties with the Ukrainian far-right activists. Antisemitic conspiracy theories were raised on both sides of the debate during 2014.[47] As for Hungary, the Jobbik

43 The Russian Connection – The spread of pro-Russian policies on the European far right, *Political Capital Institute*, 14 March 2014.

44 These would include: Národní Demokracie (National Democracy), Strana přímé demokracie (Direct Democracy Party), Alternativa pro Česko (Alternative for Czechia).

45 'Bandera' is a reference to the WWII Ukrainian nationalist politician Stephan Bandera. Today's Russian propaganda portrays the post-Maydan regime to Banderites. The term 'Judeo-Bandera' money is meant as an allusion to a conspiracy theory according to which the Ukrainian Fascism is backed by the Jews.

46 Ukraina – Żydo-banderowskie krwawe pieniądze. *Wolna Polska*, 14 March 2016.

47 For more on the internal far-right discussion on Russia, see Tarant, Zbyněk: From Donyetsk to Tel Aviv: Anti-Zionism as a Propaganda Tool among the Czech Antisemitic Movements vis-á-

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party has acquired a strong and openly pro-Russian stance, yet according to one survey, this position may be placing the party into conflict with its own electorate as the majority of the party's supporters would side with America should a conflict between the two powers arise.[48] Even the supporters of the ruling Fidesz party in Hungary are divided equally regarding the issue of Russia and America.[49]

The French *Front National* was initially anti-Communist, a stance which inhibited cooperation with post-Soviet Russia, and it also supported EU integration to a certain extent in the 1980s and 1990s.[50] The Dutch Freedom Party was critical of the EU from the very beginning, yet it based its ideology on the 'protection of the West' and supported the American War on Terror. Their anti-Muslim rhetoric has often been closely connected to ostensible support for Israel. After all, the Dutch Freedom Party was one of the European New Right parties to be criticized by the neo-Nazi "Old Right" during the late 2000s. In 2009, the German NPD-linked magazine, *Das Volk in Bewegung*, attacked the so-called 'Israel Connection', by which it meant the New Right movements and parties such as *Vlaams Belang* in Belgium, the *British National Party* (BNP) in Britain, *Partij Voor De Vrijheid* (PVV) in the Netherlands, and *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) in Austria. The main criticism was that these parties were discussing Israel and sometimes America as counterweights to the alleged Islamic threat and were thus possibly being used as Israeli tools in order to hijack the radical right for Zionist purposes.[51] Some of these conflicts and quarrels dissipated only after the eastward shift was completed, with the result that we can today observe the Old Right shaking hands with the New Right.

vis the War in Ukraine – Talk given at the International Scholars Conference: "Anti-Zionism, Antisemitism, and the Dynamics of Delegitimization," April 2–6, 2016. *YouTube – channel ISCA Indiana University.*

48 Magyari, Péter: A magyarok többsége Amerikát választaná és nem Oroszországot, *444.hu*, 7 January 2015.

49 The main results of the original Hungarian survey are quoted in English by: Juhász, Attila, Győri Lóránt, Péter Krekó and András Dezső: 'I am EurasIan' – The Kremlin connections of the Hungarian far-right. *Political Capital & Social Development Institute*, March 2015.

50 Poliyakova, Alina: Putinism and the European Far Right. *Institute of Modern Russia*, 19 January 2016.

51 Das Volk in Bewegung 1 (2009).

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Financial Links

Russia's funding of the European far-right parties has started to attract the attention of the Western security services in recent years, especially in connection with their lobbying against anti-Russian sanctions or "Brexit". However, the issue is more long-standing, especially in Eastern Europe and the Baltics. Secret Intelligence agencies, NGOs and think-tanks in Eastern European countries have been warning against growing Russian interference in domestic affairs by means of either far-right or internationalist activism since at least 2009.[52] As early as 2008, the Czech *Security Information Service* openly identified Russia's return to the practice of taking so-called "active measures", which meant their engagement in direct interference in domestic political affairs.[53]

There are currently several cases of suspected funding of the far-right parties by Russia. Monetary transfers from Russia by means of cheap gold sales were suspected in the case of *Alternative for Germany.*[54] The US intelligence forces opened an investigation into the Russian funding of groups and parties such as *Jobbik* in Hungary, the *Golden Dawn* in Greece, the *Northern League* in Italy and the *Front National* in France.[55] The Czech Security Information Service talks openly about Russian secret services "creating or promoting inter-societal and inter-political tensions in the Czech Republic (foundation of puppet organizations, covert and open support of populist or extremist subjects)".[56] The funding of the *Front National's* election campaign was widely discussed in Europe. When all the major European banks declined to provide loans for the party's political campaign, Marine Le Pen started looking for other sources of funding and approached the controversial *First Czech-Russian Bank* (FCRB). This financial institution, originally established in the 1990s to promote Czech investment in Russia, was considered to be a tool of Russian financial leverage in the region at the time,[57] as well as providing a connection to tax havens for Russian oligarchs.[58]

52 Russia's Far-Right Friends. Risk and Forecast, 3 December 2009.

53 Annual Report of the Security Information Service for 2008. Czech Security Information Service.

54 Baker, Peter and Steven Erlanger: Russia Uses Money and Ideology to Fight Western Sanctions. *The New York Times*, 7 June 2015.

55 Foster, Peter: Russia accused of clandestine funding of European parties as US conducts major review of Vladimir Putin's strategy. *The Telegraph*, 16 January 2016.

56 Annual Report of the Security Information Service for 2015. Security Information Service (BIS).

57 Kundra, Onřej: Marine Le Penová si půjčila u První česko-ruské banky. *Respekt*, 24 November 2014.

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The case had an unexpected aftermath, with the FCRB going bankrupt in December 2016. The circumstances of the bankruptcy are under investigation by both the Czech and Russian police, due to the suspicion of financial fraud on the part of the bank's higher management.[59] The collapse of the controversial bank has caused serious problems for the Le Pen campaign, which was suddenly cut off from its main source of funding.[60] Le Pen was forced to turn to her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, for a financial loan, even though she had previously expelled him from the party following his antisemitic remarks.[61]

In a highly controversial move in March 2017, Ukrainian nationalist hackers have stolen and leaked the personal files of a Belorussian national Alexander Usovski. According to these documents, veracity of which was later confirmed by Usovski himself,[62] this pro-Kremlin activist used money donated by the Russian oligarchs via his Slovak-based NGO *Východoeurópska kultúrna iniciatíva* (East-European Cultural Initiative) to sponsor neo-Stalinist and far-right events in the V4 countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary). Usovski allegedly cooperated with Konstantin Zatulin of Putin's *United Russia* party. The purpose of Usovski's NGO was to "promote the ideas of the Russian world". Details of financial costs were revealed, including 75 000 Euro for launching of a "discussion club" and 42 000 Euro for monthly expenses of the NGO itself. In one of the materials, Usovski calculates the costs of a joint rally with *Jobbik* in Hungary to 2500 Euro. In Poland, Usovski provided funds to the Polish nationalist movement *Obóz Wielkiej Polski* (Camp of Great Poland). The same correspondence reveals that the funds from the Russian pro-Government oligarchs and companies have dried out in late 2014 after Vladislav Surkov took over the agenda of Donbas, replaced majority of the Russian field commanders in Eastern Ukraine and cut off all persons linked to the Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofyev, including Usovski himself.[63] Not only that this case provides a concrete evidence for the Russian funding of some of the European far-right parties, it also documents how the funding actually works – that it takes place over indirect unofficial

58 Břešťan, Robert: Ruské banky v Česku. Tranzit pro daňové ráje? *Hlídacípes.org*, 12 September 2015.

59 Le Pen Struggling to Fund French Race as Russian Bank Fails. *Bloomberg*, 22 December 2016.

60 Bednárová, Lucie: Le Penové chybí miliony. Pád česko-ruské banky ji odstřihl od půjček a možná nezaplatí kampaň. *E15.cz*, 22 December 2016.

61 Hacot, Valérie: Marine Le Pen aura bien les sous de papa. *Le Parisien*, 31 December 2016.

62 Usovski, Alexander: Ya demiug i seryi kardinal Kremla. A vy dumali? *Livejournal – Alexander Usovski's personnal blog*, 24 February 2017.

63 Kremlin is behind anti-Ukrainian protests in Poland: analysis of the hacked correspondence. *Informnapalm*, 7 March 2017.

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channels that are easy to deny or shut off at any time. Finally, it also documents, how the pro-Kremlin "trolls" can easily become victims of the internal power struggle within Kremlin itself.

Personal Llinks

There are several dozen explicit cases in which far-right parties, including anti-semitic ones, have made direct contact with Russian officials.[64] Such cases include the personal visit of the leader of *Ataka*, the Bulgarian far-right party, to Moscow to celebrate Putin's birthday, or a Hungarian party representative of *Jobbik* speaking at Moscow University at an event organized by Kremlin-connected right-wing Russian nationalists. But even more cases are piling up, such as the meeting of the Russian oligarch, Konstantin Malofeev, with the *FPÖ*, the *National Front* and *Ataka*. According to the Swiss newspaper Tages-Anzeiger, which uncovered the secret meeting, the Euroasianist ideologue, Alexander Dugin, was also present.[65]

The most notorious case has to be the "Election monitoring missions". Following the uprising in Eastern Ukraine in November 2014, delegations of European far-right parties set out to the Donetsk region to act as "monitors" in the elections held in the self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic". Despite the ostensible anti-Fascist ethos behind the Russian incursion in the Ukraine, the list of the mission's participants could be read as a "who's who" of the European fascist and neo-Nazi scenes. Among the monitors, we find Johannes Hübner and Johann Gudenus of the *FPÖ* (Austria) and Johann Stadler of the right-wing populist *BZÖ* (Austria). The list also includes Aymeric Chauprade of *the Front National* (France), Frank Creyelman and Jan Penris of the *Vlaams Belang* (Belgium), as well as the former neo-Nazi activist Luc Michel, currently a member of the Parti *Communautaire National-Européen* (Belgium). Central and Eastern European representatives included *Jobbik's* leader, Béla Kovács (Hungary), Mateusz Piskorski of the *Zmiana* party (Poland)[66] and two members of *Ataka* (Bulgaria). It also included several neo-Stalinist radicals, such as the *Die Linke* representatives from Germany (Hikmat al-Sabty, Torsten Koplin, Piotr Luczak or Monika Merk) and Erkki Johan Bäckman from Finland. Some of the monitors were former Communists, who had switched allegiance to the right-wing, such as the Czech Senator

64 Polyakova, Alina: Putinism and the European Far Right. *Institute of Modern Russia*, 19 January 2016.
65 Odehnal, Bernhard: Gipfeltreffen mit Putins fünfter Kolonne, *Tages-Anzeiger*, 3. June 2014.
66 Polish politician working for the money to Russia. Molodyi Bukovynets, 26 May 2016.

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Ladislav Doubrava (Communist, later the *North Bohemian Party*) and Ladislav Zemánek (*Communist Youth*, later *National Democracy*). Doubrava was already infamous for his allusions to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in one of his Senate speeches.[67] His companion, Ladislav Zemánek, openly admitted via his social media profile that the journey had been organized and paid for by the Russian side.[68] All the participants of the "observation mission" were blacklisted by the Ukrainian government.[69] At least two of the participants, the Polish MP, Mateusz Piskorski[70] and the Hungarian *Jobbik* member, MEP Béla Kovács,[71] were later arrested for abusing their MEP mandates and spying against the EU and their home countries.[72]

In recent years, we have witnessed an unprecedented degree of international cooperation between various nationalist movements, with Russia playing a significant role as a mediator of such cooperation. Possibly the largest gathering of far-right leaders in the post-WWII era took place on 22 March 2015, when about 400 representatives of neo-Nazi and other far-right parties came together in St. Petersburg. Representatives from Belgium (*Euro-Rus*), Bulgaria (*Ataka*), Denmark (*The Danes*), Italy (*New Force*), Spain (*National Democracy*), Sweden (*Party of the Swedes*), UK (*British National Party*) and others came to the former Leningrad in order to discuss pan-European cooperation. The conference was organized by the Russian far-right party, *Rodina* (Fatherland).[73] It was one of the largest international meetings of far-right parties in the post cold-war history, even though two large parties – *Jobbik* and *Front National* refused to participate, perhaps to avoid being linked to neo-Nazi participants attending the event. This particular meeting was not officially coordinated by the Russian authorities; however, several members of the organizing *Rodina* party were Russian MPs (its founder, Dmitri Rogozin, is a Russian Deputy Prime Minister). However,

67 Senátor pobouřil kolegy citací z antisemitských Protokolů sionských mudrců. *Novinky.cz,* 7 October 2011.

68 Ladislav Zemánek's post on his Facebook, 4 November 2014: "The action was organized by Russia, and it was obvious who paid for it, [...] I recognize the recent elections in the Donetsk region [...] I can state with a clear conscience that I did not notice any mistakes during these elections, they were held in a very friendly atmosphere and with great enthusiasm."

69 MVS Vstanovilo osobi 'sposterihatschiv' na tak zvanich 'viborach DNR', hotuyutsya sankcii (spisok). *Natsionalna Politsia Ukraini,* 3 November 2014.

70 Polish politician working for the money to Russia. Molodyi Bukovynets, 26 May 2016.

71 Juhász, Attila/Győri, Lóránt/Krekó, Péter/ Dezső, András: 'I am EurasIan' The Kremlin connections of the Hungarian far-right. *Political Capital & Social Development Institute*, March 2015.

72 Court verdicts in relation to these two cases were not available at the moment of writing this article.

73 Nielsen, Nikolaj: European neo-Nazis hold meeting in Russia. *EUobserver,* 23 March 2015.

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the fact that the same Russian authorities that have been willing to mobilize large police forces to stop a small group of feminist or anti-regime protesters are willing to tolerate a pan-European gathering of far-right and neo-Nazi parties, underlines the relationship between Russia and the European far-right. As the Czech anarchist magazine, A2, reported, the Russian police did eventually arrive at the scene – to remove a group of anti-Fascists who had staged a protest in front of the conference venue.[74]

In December 2015, the so-called *World Conservative-National Movement* (WNCM) was established, perhaps to mimic the Soviet Communist International, only this time with far-right parties, including neo-Nazis.[75] The event, organized by the Russian party *Rodina* and the *Russian Imperial Movement*, was likely a continuation of the March 2015 meeting. According to the Russian anti-racist think-tank *Sova Center*, 71 parties and individuals were invited, including the Golden Dawn (Greece), *Jobbik* (Hungary), *Falanga* (Poland), *Slovak National Party* (Slovakia), *Identity Generation*, *National Democracy* and *Workers' Party* (all from the Czech Republic), *Nordic Resistance* (Sweden), *New Force* (Italy), *The Danish Party* (Denmark) etc. Invited individuals included the foremost far-right and antisemitic leaders, such as David Duke (USA), Jared Taylor (USA), Sam Dixon (USA), Udo Voigt (Germany), Lempros Fountulis (Greece), Georgios Epitidios (Greece), Tomislav Sunić (Croatia) among others.[76] Jean-Marie Le Pen was appointed as the leader of the movement. In January 2016, the influential Czech pro-Russian fake news site *Aeronet* praised the foundation of the movement as the true "nationalist International".[77]

Conclusion

The affinity between far-right parties and Russia is certainly the result of a longer process, influenced by both the inner dynamics of the far-right scene itself and the policy changes on part of the Russian administration. In recent years, we have witnessed dozens of meetings, events, joint rallies, observation missions, as well as financial and personal links, that have raised uncomfortable questions

74 Tomek, Miroslav: "Fascist shit" v Petrohradě. *A2larm,* 30. March 2015.

75 Výroční zpráva o extremismu na území České republiky v roce 2015. *Czech Ministry of Interior.*

76 Participants, who are invited to participation in "Worldwide National Conservative Movement". *Sova Center.*

77 Nacionalistická internacionála založena! V čele Jean-Marie Le Pen a ve vedení národní demokraté. *Aeronet,* 5 January 2016.

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about the true nature of Russian 'anti-Fascism'. The situation has prompted the intelligence services of NATO countries to openly warn against Russian attempts to re-establish the Comintern (i.e. the Communist international), only with far-right, anti-Semitic and Neo-Nazi parties in the place of Communists. However, Russia's relationship with far-right parties and movements in the West seems to predominantly representing a "marriage of convenience", i.e. something that could be abandoned once the Russian regime finds more influential partners in its national-conservative struggle against the Western liberalism. The Russian administration has no special interest in the Vlemish or Polish nationalism, yet it plays the 21st century version of the 'divide and conquer' tactics, for which the far-right provides a strong leverage thanks to its destabilizing and polarizing actions within the Western societies. While most of the activities might not be organized by the Russian Government directly, there are Government officials involved, such as the Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Rogozin or the Konstantin Zatulin, first deputy chairman of the committee of the State Duma for the CIS and relations with Russian nationals abroad. There is also the fact that Russia allows the European far-right political events to take place in Moscow, while domestic pro-democracy movements and political activists are being persecuted or even assassinated. If anything, this paradox points to what the true priorities of the Russian administration might be.

Antisemitism is currently not a systematic political program for Russia. It does however survive in a latent form in the conspiracist thought of the Putin's regime, and it is also seen as an effective propaganda weapon vis-á-vis Ukraine and the West. It is often tolerated as necessary in order to establish and maintain contacts with the foreign far-right, nationalist, conspiracist and separatist movements or invoked in order to blame political enemies. This brings new challenges, as in the world of 'post-truth' and 'alternative facts' it is very easy to fall victim to somebody else's propaganda warfare. In the past, Jews had to be vigilant in relation to their enemies. Today, Jewish leaders are strongly advised to be equally careful about those who claim to be their friends.

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